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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

16 April 1985

SUDAN: The Interim Regime

Summary

The overthrow of Gaafar Nimeiri has unleashed political forces that will keep Sudan in flux for at least the next several months. The generally pro-Western senior officers who ousted Nimeiri have begun --and appear intent on completing--a transition to civilian rule. Negotiations are continuing on the formation of a mixed civilian-military interim cabinet, which will execute policy under the continued authority of the Transitional Military Council.

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We believe there is a slightly better than even chance that the projected one-year transition to full civilian rule will be successfully completed. There is a somewhat less, but still significant, chance that radical officers will overthrow the interim government and establish a Communist, Ba'thist, or pro-Libyan regime, resulting in a drastic downturn in Sudan's relations with the US and with moderate Arab regimes such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

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The interim government will be severely strained by internal divisions, both between and within its civilian and military elements. Other major

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This memorandum was prepared by

the Egypt-Sudan Branch, Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Information as of 15 April 1985 was used in preparation of this paper. Comments and queries are welcome and should be addressed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division,

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challenges to the new government will be to ensure adequate supplies of basic goods and services, to find workable compromises regarding Islamic law and other explosive social issues, and to try to negotiate an end to the southern insurgency. The insurgent leader, John Garang, has refused to deal with the military council, but he may become amenable to negotiations as civilians are brought into the government.

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The Sudanese senior military command seized power and ended the Nimeiri regime on 6 April largely to preempt a takeover by other officers. The commanders of several major military units, faced with riots and a crippling general strike and fearing their own removal by restless junior officers and enlisted men, gave the senior officers an ultimatum to replace Nimeiri or be replaced themselves.

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The junta has tried to ensure its survival by swiftly declaring a state of emergency, abolishing the constitution and governmental structures introduced by Nimeiri, and moving to bring civilians into the government. They have reassured allies by saying that existing treaties and obligations would be honored. Two days after taking power, they had reached enough of an accommodation with labor union leaders to end the general strike.

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The nominal leader of the coup, Minister of Defense and Commander in Chief General Suwar el-Dahab, is a devout Muslim with no obvious political ambitions who took control only reluctantly.

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On 9 April Suwar el-Dahab announced the formation of a Transitional Military Council (TMC) of 15 generals. Suwar el-Dahab, as Chairman, appears to remain largely a figurehead. The Deputy Chairman is the more ambitious Deputy Commander in Chief General Taj el-Din. Three other politically ambitious members include Director of Logistics Lieutenant General Tawfik Khalil, Director of Administration Lieutenant General Yusuf Husayn Ahmed, and retired Lieutenant General and former Minister of State for Defense Yusuf Hasan el-Haj. Commanders of key units in the Khartoum area also are members, including those of the airborne brigade and the armored division, both of which were instrumental in pressing for the coup. Two southern officers are on the council but probably have little influence.

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On 11 April, the TMC announced its agreement to establish an interim government to last one year. This was a key demand of

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the "Gathering of National Forces and Trade Unions," a broad front composed of formerly outlawed political parties and the trade unions that spearheaded the strikes in early April. According to press reports, the TMC and the Gathering have tentatively agreed to establish an interim cabinet that will execute policy under the continued authority of the TMC. The cabinet will have a civilian Prime Minister and be composed mostly of civilian representatives of the unions and parties that belong to the Gathering. About three seats will be reserved for southerners. The military will retain the defense portfolio, and either a military or a police officer will be Minister of Interior. Final agreement on the cabinet has been delayed by haggling among the parties and unions over the distribution of portfolios and whether any of the ministers should have strong party affiliations.

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Meanwhile, the regime has arrested over 40 civilians who were close to Nimeiri. Some of these probably will be brought to trial. The detainees include former Vice President and state security chief Omar el-Tayyib, presidential adviser Nayal Abu Grun, and some former members of the Revolutionary Command Council who brought Nimeiri to power in 1969. The arrests were largely in response to a heated and widespread public demand to purge and punish those who symbolized Nimeiri's authority and policies. Senior officers also hoped to placate union leaders and forestall resumption of the general strike.

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Immediate Challenges

Despite the popular euphoria in Khartoum following Nimeiri's removal, the TMC has yet to consolidate its authority over the army or even begin to gain legitimacy among civilian groups. Many view the senior officers as too closely tied to Nimeiri and as having preempted the "real" revolution, which would have swept away all vestiges of the former regime. Recent public statements by Suwar el-Dahab and other officers since the coup have eroded hopes for a complete reversal of Nimeiri's policies. For example, Suwar el-Dahab forfeited the public relations value of the suspension of the constitution when he declared that all laws of the former regime would remain in effect indefinitely anyway.

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Meanwhile, the military government faces the prospect of renewed civil unrest unless it can persuade civilian opposition elements that it will permit the restoration of genuine civilian rule. [redacted]

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Northern Political Elements

The leaders of the northern opposition parties, both those within Sudan and those in exile, appear not to have played a direct role in organizing the riots and general strike that precipitated the coup. Party members, however, have been prominent in the professional and trade unions. Despite union demands for representation in an interim government, some opposition party leaders may be reluctant to cooperate with the TMC until it appears more secure. [redacted]

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The more radical leftist groups--specifically the Communists and the Ba'thists--appear less pleased with the basically pro-West and conservative makeup of the military council than do such leaders of conservative religious groups as Sadiq el-Mahdi of the Ansars, Muhammad el-Mirghani of the Khatmiyyah, and Hasan el-Turabi of the Muslim Brotherhood. The religious parties remain wary of leftist strength in the unions. They would tolerate a slow transition to civilian rule if they were certain the military would keep its promise to hold elections. [redacted]

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Few civilian politicians stand out as obvious candidates to dominate an interim or follow-on government. The two persons most frequently mentioned to be interim Prime Minister are the head of the doctors' union, el-Ghazuli Dafallah, and the leader of the lawyers' union, Mirghani el-Nasri. Former Foreign Minister Mansur Khalid is perhaps the best-known political figure in exile, and he has been working to unite all segments of the Sudanese opposition abroad. Sadiq el-Mahdi--leader of the Ansars, a former Prime Minister, and probably the most prominent civilian opposition leader within Sudan--almost certainly would run for Prime Minister again in free elections, and he would stand a good chance to win. He has indicated, however, he does not want to serve in the interim government. [redacted]

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Economic Paralysis

One of the new regime's greatest challenges is to restore health to the Sudanese economy, which had been virtually at a standstill even before the strikes that led to Nimeiri's ouster. A government edict in February that replaced the private

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foreign exchange market with a bank-regulated market has sharply reduced the availability of foreign exchange, especially for traders in the private sector. Essential imports, including food and fuel, consequently are in critically short supply, according to US Embassy sources. Strike-related supply disruptions may also have contributed to the current, greater than normal, shortages. [redacted]

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The sharp drop in imports has also drastically reduced government revenues, which are heavily dependent on custom duties. In addition, inappropriate and irresponsible government export policies have decreased export earnings below even their normal seasonal low. The extreme shortage of funds reportedly forced the Nimeiri regime to engage in an accelerated money-printing operation, the inflationary effects of which will continue to be felt in the months ahead. [redacted]

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Resumption of balance of payments support from foreign donors will provide a badly needed infusion of hard currency. The US recently released \$67 million in aid frozen from the previous year, and the Saudis have provided \$85 million. Khartoum will, nevertheless, need \$150 million by May just to meet arrears to the IMF. The IMF's informal approval of an economic reform package has already been jeopardized by substantial wage increases and price rollbacks made in the final hours before Nimeiri's fall and maintained by the new regime. Suwar el-Dahab has vowed publicly to keep the economic austerity program in place. Given the fragile political balance in the interim government, however, it is doubtful that the recent economic concessions will be reversed or that any rigorous program of economic reform will be pushed very far or very quickly. [redacted]

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Islamization

Another difficult question facing the interim government is what should become of Nimeiri's program to Islamize Sudanese society and law. Suwar el-Dahab said in a published interview that Islamic law should remain but be modified to eliminate "excessive" and "incorrect" punishments. His dismissal of the chief justice, who advocated strong administration of Islamic law, is consistent with this view. [redacted]

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The interim government will try to leave resolution of the issue as much as possible to a follow-on regime. It risks stirring up strong opposition no matter which course it takes. On one hand, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hasan el-Turabi--who was released from jail after the coup but has not cooperated with other civilian elements and was left out of the Gathering--is organizing rallies and an "Islamic Front" to press for strict Islamic law. On the other hand, there is already a backlash against Islamization among many northerners, as indicated by chants of "We want beer" from crowds that celebrated in Khartoum's streets after Nimeiri's removal. Moreover, if

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progress is to be made toward a political settlement in the south, the government almost certainly would have to offer assurances that Islamic law will not be imposed in that region.

The Southern Insurgency

Southern rebel leader John Garang has denounced the TMC as "Nimeiri's regime without Nimeiri" and called for continued strikes and demonstrations. He declared a limited ceasefire on 9 April and gave the military government one week to transfer power to civilians or face renewed fighting. General Suwar el-Dahab said publicly he does not take this ultimatum seriously, and he claims to have sent an envoy to Garang to arrange for negotiations.

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Although Garang has closed the door to talks with the military council, he is more likely to negotiate with the interim civilian-military cabinet, which is less closely associated with Nimeiri. One of his spokesmen said on 14 April that the insurgents will maintain contacts and hold consultations with the union leaders in the Gathering. In addition, Garang previously declared he was ready to talk directly with Sudanese Army commanders in the field and to "ignore" the generals in Khartoum.

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The generals know well the futility of trying to quell the southern insurgency by military means alone. Resupply of the southern garrisons will continue to be an intractable problem, especially with the onset of the rainy season in May. The morale of troops stationed in the south remains low despite the advent of a military government, because of shortages of equipment, food and fuel. Moreover, mid- to low-level officers have a low opinion of Suwar el-Dahab's military ability.

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The generals will be reluctant to test their troops' loyalty by a vigorous prosecution of the war. They may have to call upon this loyalty to consolidate or maintain their position in Khartoum. The interim government's best option toward the south will be to try to negotiate with the rebels and, failing that, to undercut their support through such concessions as restoration of southern regional government and a sharing of oil revenues. Khartoum also will try--but probably with little or no success --to persuade Libya and Ethiopia to cut off their support to the insurgents.

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Nimeiri's departure fulfilled one of the rebels' major objectives but ultimately may work against Garang's movement. For the time being, the insurgents, who are better armed and equipped than government forces, will still be able to deny control of the south to Khartoum. Now that the common enemy of Sudanese oppositionists is gone, however, the rebels will have difficulty keeping and recruiting fighters--especially in Equatoria Region, where tribal rivalries have prevented Garang from gaining a strong foothold. Garang has no clear route toward participation in the next transfer of power in Khartoum. Northerners believe political power there is their own business, and they appear to have put the southern problem in general and the insurgency in particular on hold until the northern house has been put in order. Exiled opposition leaders have commented that Garang, by being so obdurate regarding negotiations with Khartoum, risks losing the sympathy he has developed among northerners. [redacted]

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Foreign Relations

Sudan's neighbors view the new regime as weak, and they are maneuvering to shape events in Khartoum to serve their regional objectives. Egyptian and Saudi leaders are particularly concerned about instability in Khartoum, and they have been cautiously trying to bolster the new government in hope of forestalling a slide by Sudan into political alignment with Libya and Ethiopia. [redacted]

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Saudi Arabian concern for the survival of the new military government appears to be growing. The Saudis moved quickly last week to signal their public support for Suwar el-Dahab. According to the US Embassy, they expressed little enthusiasm for increasing their aid to Khartoum, [redacted]

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Libyan leader Qadhafi probably hopes to coax or pressure the new government into abandoning Sudan's past policies of support for Camp David and Libyan dissidents and military cooperation with the US. As a first step, Qadhafi almost certainly will seek to restore diplomatic relations with Khartoum, although he may be developing contingency plans to undermine the interim government if it continues most of Nimeiri's foreign policies. Qadhafi has publicly applauded the military coup and possibly has offered funds to the new government, but Libyan bombers have started to train over southeast Libya

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He may be funding a pro-Libyan group of junior Sudanese officers, according to an untested source of the US Embassy.

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Moscow appears to be taking a positive stance toward the new regime. Khartoum announced the receipt of a Soviet message expressing satisfaction over the coup and the hope that bilateral relations would improve. Although Soviet media have not mentioned such a message, a Pravda article commented favorably on the regime's release of Sudanese Communists from jail and cited reports of increased political activities by Communists and former opposition groups. The article also noted Sudan's intention to settle differences with neighboring states through dialogue.

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Nevertheless, the Soviet media's acknowledgment that the new regime has pledged to maintain good ties with the US suggests that Moscow remains uncertain about Khartoum's desire to improve Sudanese-Soviet ties. The Soviets are likely to avoid criticizing the new government while continuing the low-level dialogue that began in the year preceding Nimeiri's overthrow. The USSR also wants to avoid complicating its efforts to improve ties with Egypt.

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Prospects and Implications

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We believe there is a slightly better than even chance that the senior officers on the TMC will maintain their influence during the projected one-year transitional period and that the process of installing a civilian-military interim regime and preparing for elections will stay more or less on track. The prevailing sentiment within the TMC seems to be in favor of carrying through on the promise of an orderly restoration of civilian rule. Political figures in opposition to the Nimeiri government and resident in the UK have told US officials they are guardedly optimistic about the intentions of the generals. The interim government will be severely tested by its own internal divisions, however, not only between the military and civilians but also within each of these two elements. There are likely to be changes within the military council, perhaps with Suwar el-Dahab being pushed out of the chairmanship. There also will be increasingly open disagreements among the groups that make up the Gathering of National Forces, which traditionally have been united by little more than their opposition to Nimeiri. This has already been foreshadowed by the difficulty the members of the Gathering have had in agreeing upon a slate of interim ministers.

[Redacted]

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Political stability and US interests would be best served if, despite these internal splits, the TMC retains its predominant role and the process of forming a military-civilian coalition continues. The military council has made it clear it views continued US economic and military support as crucial. Most of its members are pro-Western and pro-US.

Nonetheless, the interim government's domestic position will be too fragile for it to appear to be closely tied to the US. Suwar el-Dahab made these points in his first meeting with the US Ambassador, when he asked that joint planning for the Bright Star military exercises scheduled for later this year be postponed. He did not say he would abrogate Nimeiri's offers of access rights for US forces and the prepositioning of US equipment at Port Sudan, but he said he could not afford publicity on these matters for now.

[Redacted]

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As part of the interim government's effort to cultivate a more nonaligned image, it probably will be less supportive of US positions in regional forums. Its support for the Camp David

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Accords will be less enthusiastic, although the government is unlikely to withdraw its endorsement altogether. [redacted]

There is still a significant chance that radical military officers, most likely in the middle to lower grades, will overthrow the interim government. This would become increasingly likely if the military-civilian agreement on transitional arrangements broke down or if a serious power struggle took place within the military leadership. A successful coup by radical officers probably would be bloody and would result in the formation of a repressive regime that might be dominated by Communist, Ba'thist, or pro-Libyan officers. Such officers would promptly seek major support from Libya or the USSR, realizing they could not stay in power long without it. Such a regime would abrogate military and security cooperation with the United States, adopt a strongly anti-US position on Arab-Israeli matters and other international issues, and end or sharply curtail cooperation with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other moderate regimes in the area. [redacted]

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TABLE

MEMBERS OF THE
TRANSITIONAL MILITARY COUNCIL
(TMC)

| <u>Rank/Name/Service</u> | <u>Position</u> | <u>Comment</u> | |
|--|--|---|------|
| GEN Abdel Rahman Mohamed el-Hassan Suwar el-Dahab (Army Infantry) | Chairman of TMC, Commander in Chief of Armed Forces | Pious Muslim, pro-West, ineffectual military leader | |
| GEN Taj el-Din Abdalla Fadl (Army Infantry) | Deputy Chairman of TMC, Deputy Commander in Chief of Armed Forces, Director of Operations | Muslim (not devout) | |
| LIG Mohammed Mirghani el-Tahir (Air Force) | Commander of the Air Force | Muslim, nationalistic | |
| LIG Yusuf Husayn Ahmed (Navy) | Director of Administration | Muslim, former Commander of the Navy | 25X1 |
| LIG Mohamed Tawfik Khalil Ibrahim (Army Engineer) | Director of Logistics | Muslim, pro-West (esp. UK). [redacted] [redacted] respected military leader | 25X1 |
| LIG (Ret) Yusuf Hasan el-Haj (Army Infantry) | Member TMC | Muslim, pro-US, former Minister of State for Defense | 25X1 |
| MG Fabian Agama Long (Army Infantry) | Commandant of Command and Staff College | Southerner (Dinka), pro-US | |
| MG James Loro (Army Infantry) | Director of Military Cooperatives | Southerner (Equatorian), Anya Nya I guerrilla, pro-West | |
| MG Osman el-Amin el-Sayyid (Army Armor) | Commandant of Military College, Senior Officer within the Wadi Seidna area Command | not respected as a leader | |
| MG Ibrahim Yusuf el-Gali Awad (Army Infantry) | Commander of Airborne Brigade | pro-West, not airborne qualified | |
| MG Hamada Abdel Azim Hamada (Army Armor) | Acting Commander of 7th Armored Division | pro-West, experienced, forceful commander | |
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| <u>Rank/Name/Service</u> | <u>Position</u> | <u>Comment</u> |
|---|--|-------------------|
| BG Osman Abdullah Mohamed (Army Infantry) | Acting Director of Operations Branch | |
| BG Fadlallah Burma Naser (Army Infantry) | Commander of Transportation Corps, Khartoum North area Commander | |
| BG Abdel Aziz Mohamed el-Amin (Army Engineer) | Commander of Engineer Corps | respected officer |
| BG Faris Abdullah Hosni (Army Intelligence) | Director of Military Intelligence | pro-West |



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